FEATURES

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE:
THE CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

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On May 5, 2003, Professor Rita Süßmuth (University of Göttingen), former Speaker of the Bundestag (Bundestagspräsidentin) and Chair of the Independent Council of Experts on Migration and Integration (appointed by the German government), delivered the third Gerd Bucerius Lecture. The event was sponsored by the ZEIT Foundation.

Today I will be speaking to you about migration in transatlantic perspective. When I use the term migrants, I will be referring to all people who cross international borders to live outside their country of citizenship, both temporarily and permanently; legally and illegally; voluntarily and as refugees. This is an important issue that is nowhere receiving the urgent political attention it requires. I am pleased to be speaking to you in the United States of America, a country with a long history of immigration, a country that knows first hand the challenges and enrichment that immigration can bring.

Through my work as the chair of Germany’s Independent Commission on Migration in 2000 and 2001 and through my current appointment (May 2003) as chair of the newly established Independent German Council of Experts on Migration and Integration, I have spent much time analyzing migration issues in Germany and worldwide. I have examined diverse, international methods of steering migration and fostering integration. I have studied demographic and migration trends to try to understand how these issues will develop in the twenty-first century. I can only conclude that the international community and individual nations have much more to do in this policy area. At present, no national immigration policy is adequately facing the challenges of the future, and no society has reached the degree of ethnic and cultural openness necessary to deal with those challenges.

Having said this, my first thesis today is:

1. The twentieth century was just the beginning! The twenty-first century already is, and will continue to be, the century of worldwide migration. Many countries, especially Germany, are in a state of denial about this fact. This has to change!
Rita Süssmuth delivering the Bucerius Lecture
The current causes of migration differ from those of the past. People no longer migrate to form colonies, to spread their religious beliefs, or to exercise power in another country. However, economic hardship, political, religious, and ethnic persecution, family reunification, and the search for better economic opportunities or relief from natural catastrophes remain constant motivations for migration. Alongside these factors, modern transportation and communication networks are making migration more popular than ever before. Additionally, 50 percent of worldwide migrants are women, a fact that is unknown to many people.

Each of the approximately 200 countries on this earth is either a destination, transit, or source country of international migration, or a combination of these. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 175 million people lived outside of their country of citizenship in the year 2000. Relying on data from the UN Population Division, the IOM has documented a marked rise in the number of migrants worldwide since 1965. There were 75 million international migrants in 1965. In 1975, the figure rose to 84 million and, in 1985, to 105 million. In 1990, there were 120 million and, in 2000, there were 175 million international migrants worldwide.2

With a world population of 6 billion people in the year 2000, only 1 out of every 35 people migrated across international borders. That is to say, about 2.9% of the world’s people are living in a country where they are not citizens. The international migrant population, therefore, forms a clear minority of the world’s population. However, the portion of the world’s population that is on the move is growing faster than the global population as a whole, which means the percentage of people on the move will be increasing in the future. One must also consider that the world’s migrant population influences both the destination countries and the countries of origin far more than the numbers alone would suggest.

Just as we can try to use recent trends to predict future population growth, we can also try to sketch a picture of the future world migrant population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s population projection, by 2050 the current world population of 6 billion people will expand to 9 billion inhabitants. This represents a 50 percent increase in world population. If the international migrant community continues to increase at the current rate of 2.59 percent,3 then the world’s international migrant population would be 539 million people in 2050. When this projected immigrant population worldwide is compared with the projected world population mentioned previously, it would compose about 6% of the world population in 2050. Although this calculation is primitive and does not adequately consider variables such as epidemic diseases like HIV/AIDS—HIV is expected to reduce the population on the African continent by one-third in the coming decades—this calculation demonstrates that
we can expect the migrant population to increase relative to worldwide population. According to this calculation, the international migrant population as a portion of world population will have more than doubled by 2050, and the number of international migrants will be three times the current level.

2. The current German and European practices of erecting barriers and making immigration policy on the national level will not be plausible strategies for dealing with migration in the twenty-first century.

The European Union has taken its first steps toward coordinating its migration policy. In 1999, at the Tempere Summit, the EU member states pledged to coordinate their migration policies in the area of asylum and refugees by the year 2004. Since the Tempere Summit, the European Council has drafted guidelines on several aspects of asylum policy that each EU country is obliged to enact in national law. Also, in February of 2003, the Interior Ministers of EU countries reached consensus on harmonizing family reunification policies. Since the EU Summit in Thessaloniki, the EU has been granted the authority to establish policies in the areas of labor migration, refugees, and integration for all its member states. However, at this summit the EU was not granted the power to establish immigration quotas for its member countries.

3. The EU favors multi-national policies concerning migration. Starting with the issue of refugees, the EU aims to harmonize many of its migration policies and procedures.

North America, Europe, and Australia have been the main destinations of recent migrants. The increased volume of migration will challenge current structures of steering migration and fostering integration in the transatlantic community and worldwide. This challenge is one that can only be met multilaterally. This leads me to my next thesis:

4. Fear of terrorism and concern for security must not be allowed to dominate consideration of migration issues. It must remain clear at all times that it is unacceptable to equate immigrants with terrorists.

The issue of homeland security and terrorism has raised many questions relating to migration in the United States. The Immigration and Naturalization Service has been incorporated within the new Department of Homeland Security, and the agencies responsible for enforcing migration laws and for providing migration services have thus been separated. Migration is being stigmatized at the beginning of the twenty-first century in a retrogressive manner. Immigrants, especially refugees, have often been held responsible for the terrible crimes of their co-ethnics, fellow countrymen, or religious kin. History has shown us time and time
again that making a group responsible for the crimes of those falsely assumed to be part of that group is a tremendous error.

5. Transatlantic as well as international partnership and cooperation are essential to steering migration and fostering integration in the future. Transnational solutions will be the only solutions capable of meeting the challenges of twenty-first century migration.

The U.S. experience with steering immigration has already proven to be an important policy resource for Germany. In the past two years, there has been a push in Germany to develop an immigration and integration law influenced by the policies and practices of our transatlantic partners. The Federal Republic of Germany has been a country of immigration since its founding. During its early years, the Federal Republic had to integrate Germans displaced from the former eastern regions of Prussia and the Third Reich. From the mid-1950s until the early 1970s, the Federal Republic recruited large numbers of so-called guest workers. Recruitment of guest workers ended in 1973, but since then Germany has remained a country of immigration, mainly as a result of family reunification and various regulations allowing individuals with particular skills to migrate to Germany. The most popular of these regulations was the recent measure that will allow up to 20,000 computer experts to live and work in Germany.

In Germany, the immigrant, non-citizen population in 2000 was around 9%, or 7.297 million people. Additionally, 5 million “Aussiedler,” ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and Russia, have migrated to Germany. Germany has the highest number of immigrants living within its borders of any country in Europe. More than 40% of the immigrants living in Germany have been residing in the country for many decades.

The International Organization for Migration notes that “the case of Germany stands out because of the sheer volume of migration it has experienced in recent years. Throughout the 1990s, Germany was Europe’s most important country of migration, the annual registered immigration of foreign nationals consistently exceeding inflows into the rest of western Europe combined.” Most of these migrants were refugees. Like the United States, Germany has been deeply affected by immigration. Unlike the United States, Germany is undergoing the slow process of recognizing that it is a country of immigration. It is in the process of facing its longstanding inconsistencies: It is a major exporter, but does not want immigration; it has recruited workers and their families, but sees them only as “guests” staying temporarily in the country; it invests widely abroad and its citizens travel across the globe, but it sees cultural diversity at home as a threat. Having recognized the need for trade and investment, Germany must recognize the inevitability of migration and
cultural exchange. This is a delayed learning process that is taking place in Germany and in Europe.

Although immigration has taken place throughout the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, Germany denied that it was a country of immigration until 2000. In that year, Germany’s political parties came to a consensus recognizing that Germany is indeed a country of immigration. This long overdue step forward in modernizing German thinking and immigration law was immediately followed by a step backward. German politicians, especially conservatives, fought to distinguish the situation in Germany from that in other countries of immigration. There was a debate about German ethnic homogeneity. Some asserted that there is a German *Leitkultur*, a guiding culture, and that Germany is not a “classical country of immigration.” The German word for immigration, *Einwanderung*, was replaced by a new term, *Zuwanderung*, highlighting the fact that the movement of persons to Germany did not necessarily have to be permanent, but could also be temporary or transitional. The current discussion in Germany has not been successful at lifting the long-standing myth that homogeneity is the only glue binding German society together. This leads me to my sixth thesis:

6. What initially seemed to be a change in the German immigration paradigm turned out to be two steps forward and one step back.

The current discussion of the new immigration law has prompted Germany’s changing society to confront a number of suppressed issues. These issues address the very core of the country’s identity and self-understanding. They include language, culture, values, religion, labor and unemployment, demography, education, constitutional principles, equality, and human rights.

Germany is in the process of modernizing its immigration policies with an immigration law that will increase transparency in the immigration process, speed up the asylum process, and actively offer immigrants a better chance to integrate into German society through language instruction and courses on German society and culture. Under the new law, the aforementioned Independent Council of Experts on Migration and Integration would issue an annual report evaluating the current state of immigration in Germany and recommend an immigration agenda for the coming year. There is much controversy surrounding six aspects of the new law and it will not be easy to push it through both houses of parliament. The main points of controversy are:

- the removal of the *Anwerbestopp*, a ban on recruiting foreign labor that was implemented in 1973 (This ban has been amended with so many exceptions that it would be much easier to state directly who may come to work in Germany.)
• the introduction of a point-based system for allowing skilled workers to migrate to Germany
• the number of hours integration courses, especially language courses, should last (Proposals range from 600 to 900 hours for every immigrant. How these courses are to be financed is also controversial.)
• the number of times the words “limiting immigration” should replace the words “steering immigration”
• the maximum age at which children have a right to be reunited with their parents (The current version of the draft law sets the maximum age at 12, with exceptions allowing children up to age 18 to join their families; other proposals range from 6 to 21. Current regulation sets this age at 16 in most cases.)
• the persecution of people on gender-specific grounds and the persecution of individuals by an entity that is not a nation-state.

7. The long-standing migration and especially integration policy based on the principle of passive self-regulation must be replaced in the future with a more active approach. This approach must not only be adopted in law, but must be practiced by immigrants and citizens alike.

The immigration debate in Germany has been complicated by the ongoing recession and high unemployment rate in the Federal Republic. The current hardship faced by many cannot be ignored; yet it is not a reason to ignore demographic facts that the country will face in the near future. By 2010, Germany will find itself with a growing population of retirees and a shrinking labor force. Given the extent of Germany’s welfare state, it is absolutely necessary that the country have a fully functional system of steering migration and fostering integration before the demographic crunch cripples the economy and welfare system.

The debate on immigration has forced people to take sides on the issue of integration. A front has opened between advocates of assimilation and defenders of multiculturalism. This debate has taken on a slightly different tone in Germany than in the United States—as far as I’ve understood the U.S. debate—as it is something different to assimilate into a self-consciously multicultural society than into one that believes itself to be homogeneous, even though in fact German society is not homogeneous. The key to resolving this debate in Germany is to dispel the myth of homogeneity. Whether one argues for a need for assimilation or the need to establish diversity within unity, these sides must establish a common ground on what is necessary to keep the societal glue in Germany sufficiently sticky, so to speak. This leads me to my eighth thesis:

8. In order to establish a road map for integration and to prepare a society for immigration in the twenty-first century, the myth of homogeneity must be
destroyed and clear goals must be established for newcomers and long-time members of society.

On the one hand, this means focusing on non-discrimination laws. For Germany, this means the rapid ratification of the EU ordinance on anti-discrimination, and for the transatlantic community, it means the enforcement of anti-discrimination guidelines. On the other hand, this also implies harmonizing criteria and establishing a system for achieving integration goals for all transatlantic partners.

Globalization, the increased speed of movement and communication, the greater involvement and curiosity of the global community, the growing gap between wealth and poverty, humanitarian and military intervention, humanitarian movements, international labor market migration, and the increased movement of terrorist networks have multiplied the challenges of steering migration. Today, more than ever, we need to better integrate and coordinate migration and development policy. Diversity and security have sometimes become slogans under which racial profiling is hidden. Especially following the tragic attacks in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, fear and bias can lead to outright discrimination and hatred. This brings me to my next thesis:

9. One of the biggest challenges we face in twenty-first century migration and integration is how to fight terrorism without developing an immigration system based on racial profiling and discrimination, without spurring social disintegration, and without allowing social, ethnic, and economic cleavages to destroy the social glue that unites us.

Migration is multifaceted, and migration policies must adequately address all aspects of migration, including the very difficult and complex issue of human trafficking. In addition to economic and humanitarian migrants who enter the country either legally or illegally, there is a growing number of people who are being brought to our countries enslaved. These people are often referred to as trafficked persons. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain and the establishment of democracies in Eastern Europe, human trafficking has been eating away at the democratic principles western democracies have fought so long to preserve. Human trafficking is one of the most heinous crimes that exist in the world today, and like the United States, Germany must recognize the extreme growth of this illegal trade in people over the last decade. Over the past year, at least 700,000 and possibly as many as 4 million men, women, and children worldwide were victims of human trafficking. These statistics conceal the utter misery and abuse that this group of migrants endures within our democracies! Violated and disposed of by our societies, victims of trafficking, in most cases, are treated as perpetrators and are deported to
their countries of origin based on immigration violations. This brings me to my next thesis:

10. **Migration policy must give greater attention to the trafficking in persons. Not the victims of trafficking, but rather the organized criminals behind human trafficking must be brought to justice!**

The United States and the international community have made great strides in improving the fight against human trafficking. In 2000, the UN produced a definition clarifying what human trafficking is. It is “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, or abduction, or fraud, or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” In the same year, the UN also succeeded in getting 117 signatories and 25 parties to sign the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The new protocol supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and thereby strengthens the international effort to combat human trafficking. The protocol has not yet entered into force because it has not yet been ratified by the necessary number of national parliaments. We are currently still losing the struggle against human trafficking.

11. **Humanitarian migration must be seen in a different light, especially in Germany. Refugees are not ‘weaker’ than other migrant groups. This group of—partially temporary and partially permanent—immigrants not only needs protection, but also requires the opportunity to participate fully in society.**

Often seen as the “downside” of migration issues, asylum seekers are often marginalized in destination countries to a greater extent than most immigrants. Separating people into categories of economically advantageous and disadvantageous is not an acceptable way to view immigrants. This oversimplified assumption of calculating the value of a person’s humanity has become commonplace in Germany. The infamous slogan, calling for “Zuwanderer, die uns nutzen, und nicht die, die uns aus-nutzen” (“immigrants who are useful to us and not those who use us”) was unfortunately able to heavily influence popular opinion.

The danger of separating immigrants into the categories of economically advantageous and disadvantageous, good and evil, persecuted and terrorist, illegal alien and highly skilled worker, is growing. Instead of profiting from diversity, migration, and globalization, we are off to a bad start this century as globalization has taken a turn toward hatred and an
oversimplification and artificial division of the world into east and west, 
good and evil, right and wrong. This beginning has allowed voices that 
believe diversity is a problem rather than a strength to become louder.

12. A clash of civilizations is not inevitable. Migration is a human instinct and 
has been a fact of human life from the outset. Indeed, migration has been a 
key factor in the rise of civilization. Fear and denial that our humanity lies 
in our diversity is, however, a force that could cause a demise of civilization. 
This force must be counteracted.

How the transatlantic community deals with illegal immigrants will 
be decisive in forming adequate migration policies. The United States of 
America and Germany, as well as all the other members of the transatlantic 
community, do not yet possess the tools needed to meet the migra-
tion challenges of the twenty-first century. The reduction in the num-
ber of illegal immigrants and the improvement of the quality of life of all 
immigrants should be the measuring stick by which the transatlantic 
community judges the success of its policies. Currently, policies fail to 
steer migration and foster integration. One only needs to look at the 
booming business of human trafficking to notice a distinct failure not 
only of steering migration but also of protecting human rights. This is not 
only a failure of our national policies, but also a failure of international 
cooperation and policymaking! Migration and human rights issues are 
closely connected, especially when we are dealing with victims of human 
trafficking and refugees as well as ethnic, religious, or economic discrimi-
nation. In all these areas, international cooperation is absolutely neces-
sary. The UN can play an important and central role in engineering 
plausible solutions to failing national policies. The Geneva Convention 
and the UN Charter of Human Rights are milestones along this path. This 
path must, however, be better paved.

Current countries of destination will experience a continuous rise in 
immigration throughout the twenty-first century on account of the secu-
ritv and poverty gap between industrialized and developing countries.

Future Challenges

1. Migration policy in Germany and in the EU is in the process of chang-
ing and becoming a matter primarily of EU rather than national respon-
sibility. This period of transition has been marked by national self-interest 
and protectionism, by policies aimed at curbing unwanted immigration 
of refugees from crisis regions. It is also marked by policies that aim to 
maximize “desirable” migration—young families and skilled workers—
destined for labor markets. It is a fact that most current and future EU 
member countries have low birth rates and aging populations, and that
these countries need immigration because of demographic and economic factors. These problems cannot be solved through EU-internal migration. EU-internal migration is very low, in any event, and represents only 2% of migration in the EU.

2. The EU must achieve harmonized migration policies that all of its members enforce. There needs to be a harmonized policy on how refugee status is granted, on the rights of refugees, and on residency laws. Binding agreements already exist concerning migration and refugees, such as the EU’s 1999 Tampere agreement, the UN Human Rights Charter, and the Human Rights Convention of the European Council. The main issue at hand is to find political solutions for people that we need and for those who need us. The biggest challenge in forming multinational migration policies is avoiding a two-class migration community. This is a very important task.

3. Migration policies must also be pre-emptive and provide protection for immigrants. They should prevent crisis and conflict, violence and poverty; they should encourage self-help and sustainable development. They should also allow fair participation in international trade.

Globalization that is not rooted in an international order, globalization without protection for human rights and human dignity, globalization without financial and market regulations, will not achieve these goals. The current system, in most cases, enables the powerful to make decisions contrary to the interests of the poor and vulnerable. This could lead to a situation in which radicalism, fundamentalism, ethnic hatred, violence, and cultural confrontation increase. This is why national migration policies must be anchored in, and expanded by, transnational and international policies, for example by the EU or the United Nations.

4. It is the responsibility and obligation of the transatlantic community to preserve and advance the common values of freedom, justice, and prosperity. This continues to be a long-term goal that presents us with a major challenge. National egoism continues to be more dominant than the readiness to commit oneself to the transatlantic community politically. Instead of cooperation and partnership, confrontation and violence control many regions of the world. Prevention has been a far-reaching political slogan with a short range of effectiveness. Security policies that are based mainly on military measures will lead to further escalation of violence and not to increased levels of security. In most cases, peaceful solutions to conflicts through diplomacy can lead to the sustainable economic and social development of an unstable country or region.

The EU is aware of its political weaknesses, but it also is aware of the strengths that lie in its support and enforcement of the Copenhagen Criteria for EU membership: constitutional legality, democracy, human
rights, protection of minority rights, and a market economy (understood in the EU as free and social market economies).

Democracy is not secure, and will not be so in the future, without effective and recognizable improvement of each individual’s social and economic situation.

The biggest enemies of social development and civil society are violence, propaganda, and the exclusion or oppression of people, especially when combined with displacement, persecution, and murder and when joined with the destruction of essential goods, infrastructure, and services: food, health services, shelter, education, and work. As long as the cycle of violence is not broken, we will not be able to achieve freedom or peace.

5. Destination countries know it is necessary that migration policies quantitatively steer and integrate newcomers; they also know that there are limits to how much governments can influence migration flows. Cultural diversity is a popular term used in politics, as is the term integration. Integration is a process that calls on immigrants to recognize the constitutional principles and laws of a destination country, to participate and be successful in the education system, labor force, and political culture of that destination country. This is possible only when immigrants are able to speak and understand the destination country’s language and when the destination country’s citizens, as well as immigrants, are familiar with cultural and ethnic diversity in that country. In many countries, citizens and immigrants alike currently do not possess adequate knowledge of the cultural and religious diversity in which they live. This results in the absence of mutual respect and recognition.

The challenge we face is not to dismiss our own culture; rather it is just the opposite. We must possess a strong sense of self-identity in order to be able to participate in cultural exchange and respect diversity. Being open to diversity and exercising tolerance without giving up personal identity will lead to enrichment and progress of each individual and of society as a whole. We have undervalued the common and diverse cultures in our global community for far too long. For people of all cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities, the greatest indignity is to see their culture, their way of life, underrated.

Peaceful coexistence is possible only when tolerance and abstinence from claiming the infallibility of one’s own religion or culture are practiced. We have to get away from the idea of a “clash of civilizations” and move toward intercultural dialogue. In Germany, we are just at the beginning of a long journey on the way to this goal. There have, however, been positive developments toward this aim. Our collective responsibilities in the transatlantic community result mainly from common cultural
and political traditions. Common migration challenges bind us and obligate us to work together.

With regard to my simple projection concerning the future size of the international migrant population, we have no alternative but to globalize our migration policies in an increasingly globalized world. Migration presents us with a challenge, an opportunity to make the most out of the world’s most important resource: people. Let us not pass up this opportunity!

All countries in the transatlantic partnership are facing similar challenges. We do not yet have the tools to face our upcoming challenges, but we have a wide range of experiences and ideas that we can use when confronting them. No country can meet this global challenge alone!

We must immediately increase our policy cooperation concerning the steering of migration and the fostering of integration to ensure that the twenty-first century will be one in which migration and cultural exchange are means of building civilization and not destroying it.

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Notes


4 Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Ausländerfragen, ed. Migrationsbericht der Ausländerbeauftragten (Berlin, 2002), 79.


6 http://www.osce.org/odihr/democratization/trafficking

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